



## Bracker Elementary School

121 Camino Diaz Mandemientos

Nogales, AZ 85621

Principal: Michelle Olguin

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Located close to the U.S.-Mexico border, Bracker Elementary School in Nogales, AZ serves a nearly 100% Latino, Spanish-speaking student body. Despite these challenging circumstances, the school has risen from “Out of Improvement” state status in 2004 to “Highly

Performing” in 2006, thanks to impressive, steadily rising test scores and consistent success at making their AYP targets.

- ◆ Elementary (K-5)
- ◆ 95% Hispanic
- ◆ 95% Limited English Proficient
- ◆ 73% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch

Students have shown particular success in reading, exemplified by the fact that 68% of third graders scored proficient or above in 2006, as compared to only 30% in the state. A Reading First school, Bracker dedicates three hours daily to language arts, with K-3 students studying reading for 90 minutes in addition to writing and grammar. The school uses a core reading series that comes with an intervention kit and special book for English language learners.

Administrators point to their use of assessments and data as a key to their success. At the beginning of every school year, all students are assessed using a standardized instrument. Scores are then entered into a computer program and students are grouped accordingly as benchmark (proficient or above), strategic (middle group), or intensive (highest risk); some students also take additional diagnostic tests. At the beginning of the year, the intervention team, consisting of the Title I reading specialist and instructional assistant as well as teachers, administrators, and classified staff, meets with each grade-level team to determine a plan for action around intervention teams: who will work with whom, when, and how. The team then meets once a month to discuss students and assessment data.

Most intervention work is done in the classroom, so the classroom teacher is well aware of how each student is doing. Intervention groups meet for 45-minute



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blocks and range in size, though those for intensive students often include only three to four students; kindergarten groups meet five times a week, first through third graders four times a week, and fourth and fifth graders three times a week. The only pull-out is done by the reading specialist with students most in need of focused support. Though there is only one designated English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher, all teachers have either earned ESL endorsements or taken 15 hours of training, paid for by the district. New staff members are all paired with a more experienced mentor teacher.

Bracker tests students in reading throughout the year, with schoolwide testing as well as progress monitoring and additional classroom assessments. Progress monitoring tests are used to test all students on a regular basis: benchmark students once a month, strategic students once every two weeks, and intensive students once a week; as a rule, classroom teachers administer such tests. The main test, utilized at the beginning of the year to place students, is also administered two more times during the school year. Based on these scores and on classroom performance, students can be moved in and out of different groups, depending on their changing needs. “Our system is very flexible, very fluid,” states reading specialist Marianne Falconer. “We might start some students on a phonics-based program, but as they go up, they may switch to more guided reading. ...We don’t just stick with one thing, we really change based on the needs of the students.”

Bracker maintains a strong emphasis on vocabulary acquisition; for the 2007–06 academic year, staff chose to focus on academic English in particular. Strategies around this goal included ending the habit of switching to Spanish to explain academic terms, and having teacher teams generate lists of necessary academic terms for every grade level. These lists were checked across grade levels to ensure consistency (for example, that one teacher was not saying “upper case letters” and another “capital letters”). Staff also utilize various strategies to conduct informal, ongoing assessments of students’ understanding of vocabulary through the use of whiteboards, observation, and thumbs up/thumbs down.

The strategies to support assessment, progress monitoring, and acquisition of academic English are just a few of the ingredients contained in the recipe Bracker Elementary has used to push its English learners to sustained improvement in reading.